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Jackson Arrives in U.S. With Freed Prisoners

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Jease Jackson, crowning a five day Central American tour, arrived here last night with 22 Americans and 26 Cuban political prisoners released to him by Cuban President Fidel Castro.

Two planes, one American and one Cuban, landed at Dulles International Airport at 11:30 p.m. where hundreds of relatives and friends awaited the arrival of the prisoners, some of whom had been in jail for 20 years. Also at the airport were Mayor Marion Barry and D.C. Del. Walter E. Fauntroy. [Details on Page A24.]

At a press conference after midnight at the airport, Jackson said his mission had succeeded where others have failed, "because I tried." Pressed by reporters to explain the difference, he criticized U.S. policy on Cuba and said, "A no-talk policy does not work. We must talk with the Cubans."

The trip home ended a hectic day for Jackson, who yesterday morning met with Sandinista officials in Nicaragua and criticized the Reagan administration policies in the region. The Democratic presidential candidate then flew to Havana where he picked up the prisoners, whose release he secured earlier this week.

Castro was at the Havana airport to greet Jackson. To the chant of "Fidel, Jackson" from thousands of Cubans lining the airport buildings, the two walked through a light rain across the tarmac to an airport meeting room where they talked as Cuban and American officials, including U.S. Interests Section head John Ferch, worked out the last-minute problems that held up departure of the planes.

In explaining his decision to release the prisoners, Castro said, "It

was all a result of Jackson's visit, as a goodwill gesture to him and the people of the United States. We felt we had to make a gesture of a positive nature."

Jackson, obviously pleased by his diplomatic success in securing the releases, said before leaving Havana, "Because of the 25 years of icy relations it might take some time to appreciate this breakthrough."

As a farwell token Castro offered Jackson a Cuban cigar. Jackson, who does not smoke, put the wrong end of the cigar in his mouth as Castro tried in vain to light it. When reporters asked why Jackson was smoking, he said this was a special situation because it was a "peacepipe."

Besides the prisoners released yesterday, Jackson also brought out Andres Vargas Gomez, 69, and his sister. Vargas spent 22 years in prison in Cuba on charges of spying for the CIA and was released in December 1982, but was not allowed to leave the country.

Vargas was one of the first Americans to clear customs at Dulles and spoke with reporters during Jackson's press conference. He made clear that although he was pleased by Jackson's success in getting him released, he does not share Jackson's view of Cuba or Castro.

"We're certainly happy to be here in a free country and a civilized country, but we cannot forget we were political prisoners . . . I cannot be here and allow the idea that Fidel Castro is human. Behind all this is another theme, another malicious meaning," he said in a low voice.

Most of the Americans released had been in jail on drug-trafficking charges. In Washington, federal officials said they would arrest only those Americans facing charges in this country, reported to be a small number, and release the rest.

The Cubans were issued visas by the interest sector before they departed. They will be able to apply for asylum.

Jackson said he called the White House Wednesday and was passed through to the State Department, who told him the visa requests were being worked on.

Sixteen Americans and seven Cubans flew on Jackson's plane. The rest rode on a Cuban plane.

Secret Service agents accompanying Jackson said the prisoners would be kept handcuffed and isolated aboard the aircraft on the flight to the United States.

Jackson said that during his talks with Castro, the Cuban leader had said that the reunification of Cuban families was central to his decision to release the Cubans. He said he wanted to seek a release in tensions between Cuban Americans and Cuba by bringing separated families together.

"I think he was aware of how limited the breakthrough would have been if it had just been Americans," said Jackson.

Before flying to Managua on Wednesday, Jackson unexpectedly won the release of 26 Cuban prisoners, most of whom are long-time political prisoners. The Cubans join 22 American prisoners whom Jackson negotiated to free on Tuesday after a six-hour meeting with the Cuban leader.

According to the human rights organization Amnesty International, the Cubans, a small number of the hundreds of prisoners known as plantados—Spanish for "those who take a fixed position"—were arrested for their complicity in the Bay of Pigs, the unsuccessful, CIA-organized attempt to overthrow the Castro government in 1961.

The release of the Cubans, which was discussed but not agreed upon during the six-hour meeting between the two men on Tuesday, took Jack-

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